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S E C R E T SENSITIVE VIA MARTIN CHANNELS

SAIGON 0718 IMMEDIATE
DELIVER IMMEDIATELY
APRIL 20, 1975
TO: SECRETARY HENRY A. KISSINGER
FROM: AMBASSADOR GRAHAM MARTIN

1. I SAW THIEU THIS MORNING MAKING ALL THE POINTS OUTLINED IN PARA 9 OF MY 710. I TOOK ALONG THE LATEST SUMMARY OF THE ACTUAL MILITARY ORDER OF BATTLE AND ANALYSIS OF THE COMPARATIVE FORCE EACH SIDE COULD BRING TO BEAR. AS YOU KNOW, IT IS A VERY GRIM PICTURE, AND THE CONCLUSIONS ARE INESCAPABLE THAT SHOULD HANOI CHOOSE TO RAPIDLY MOVE IN FOR THE KILL THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR SAIGON TO LAST MORE THAN A MONTH EVEN WITH THE MOST SKILLFUL AND DETERMINED RESISTANCE, PROBABLY NOT MORE THAN THREE WEEKS. I SAID THAT WHILE IT WAS MY OPINION THAT THEY WANTED SAIGON WHOLE, NOT AS A PILE OF RUBBLE, ONE COULD NOT ESCAPE THE POSSIBILITY THAT THEY MIGHT ELECT THE LATTER, IF THERE WAS NO MOVE TOWRAD NEGOTIATIONS.

2. THIEU ASKED ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR ADDITIONAL MILITARY AID. I SAID THE ANSWER SEEMED OBSCURE TO ME. WE MIGHT VERY WELL GET AN ADDITIONAL $350 MILLION, FROM THE COMMITTEES BUT EVEN THAT WAS UNCERTAIN. I SAID THAT EVERY DAY THAT WENT BY WAS CRAMMED WITH EVENTS HERE THAT BEGAN TO LIFT THE FOG OF PROPAGANDA THAT HAS FOR SO LONG OBSCURED THE PERCEPTION OF THE ACUTAL REALITIES IN VIETNAM. PERHAPS, THEY MIGHT EVEN GET THE BILL PASSED. I HOPED VERY MUCH THAT IT WOULD BE, BUT THE REALITY HERE AND NOW ON THE GROUND WAS THAT IT WOULD PRESERVE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A BETTER NEGOTIATING POSITION, IT COULD NOT ARRIVE IN TIME TO CHANGE THE BALANCE SHEET HE HAD JUST READ. AS OF NOW THE BALANCE OF FORCE ARRANGED AGAINST HIM WAS OVERWHELMING.

3. I SAID THAT ANYONE SITTING IN HIS CHAIR, INDEPENDENCE PALACE IN SAIGON, THE WHITE HOUSE, THE ELYSEE PALACE, THE KREMLIN, OR IN PEKING, HAD ONE THING IN COMMON. THEY COULD NEVER BE SURE THAT THEY WERE GETTING THE WHOLE TRUTH. SOME WOULD SHADE REPORTS FOR PERSONAL OR BUREAUCRATIC ADVANTAGE, OTHERS FOR FEAR OF HURTING HIM,

*********************************WHSR COMMENT*********************************

HAK, SCOWCROFT, MCFARLANE, RODMAN

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OTHERS BECAUSE THEY WERE AFRAID OF HIM, OTHERS BECAUSE THEY DID NOT WISH TO BE THE CONVEYOR OF BAD NEWS. WHATEVER THE REASONS, IT WAS DIFFICULT AT TIMES TO CORRECTLY PERCEIVE THINGS AS THEY ARE. I SAID I WAS SPEAKING TO HIM AS AN INDIVIDUAL ONLY, NOT FOR THE PRESIDENT OR THE SECRETARY OF STATE, OR EVEN AS THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR, BUT AS ONE WHO FOR A VERY LONG TIME HAD WATCHED EVENTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND WHO FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS HAD WORKED VERY HARD AT UNDERSTANDING THE INTERWEAVING OF THE FABRIC OF VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS. I SAID THE OLDER I GOT THE MORE I KNEW I DID NOT KNOW IT ALL, AND A REASONABLE DOUBT WAS ALWAYS PRESENT. BUT IT WAS A DIFFICULT TIME, AND PERHAPS MY PERCEPTIONS WERE AS ACCURATE AS THOSE OF ANY OTHER WESTERNER. A FEW THINGS WERE VERY CLEAR TO ME. THE MILITARY SITUATION WAS VERY BAD, AND THE PEOPLE HELD HIM RESPONSIBLE FOR IT. THE POLITICAL CLASS, BOTH HIS SUPPORTERS AND HIS ENEMIES, DID NOT BELIEVE HE COULD LEAD THE COUNTRY OUT OF ITS PRESENT CRISIS. AND IT WAS MY CONCLUSION THAT ALMOST ALL OF HIS GENERALS, ALTHOUGH THEY WOULD CONTINUE TO FIGHT, BELIEVED THAT DEFENSE WAS HOPELESS UNLESS A RESPITE COULD BE GAINED THROUGH THE BEGINNING OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS, AND THEY DID NOT BELIEVE THIS COULD BEGIN UNLESS THIEU EITHER LEFT OR TOOK IMMEDIATE STEPS TO SEE THAT THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS BEGAN. I SAID THAT IT WAS MY FEELING THAT IF HE DID NOT MOVE SOON, HIS GENERALS WOULD ASK HIM TO GO.

4. THIEU LISTENED CLOSELY. HE ASKED WHETHER HIS LEAVING WOULD AFFECT THE VOTE IN THE CONGRESS. I SAID I THOUGHT IT MIGHT HAVE CHANGED A FEW MORE SOME MONTHS AGO, BUT WOULD NOT NOW CHANGE ENOUGH TO ASSURE THE NEEDED CONTINUING MILITARY APPROPRIATIONS. IN OTHER WORDS TO OFFER TO RESIGN IF CONGRESS ASSURED A LEVEL OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR SOUTH VIETNAM SURVIVE, WAS A BARGAIN WHOSE DAY HAD PASSED IF, INDEED IT HAD EVER EXISTED, SINCE HIS OPPONENTS WOULD JUST AS EASILY HAVE ACCEPTED THE DISTORTIONS THAT WOULD BE FED TO THEM ABOUT HIS SUCESSOR, AS THEY HAD ABOUT HIM. THE IMPORTANT THING, PERHAPS, WHAT EFFECT IT MIGHT HAVE ON THE OTHER SIDE JUST NOW. I SAID I DID NOT KNOW THE ANSWER, BUT IT WAS CLEAR THAT MOST VIETNAMESE THOUGHT IT WOULD. I DOUBTED IT WOULD MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE TO THEM. THEY WERE NOT OPPOSED TO HIM PER SE, BUT TO ANY STRONG LEADER. THEY WOULD INSIST ON A MUCH WEAKER MAN. BUT THE IMPORTANT THING WAS TIME. FOR VIETNAM, NOW TIME WAS THE ESSENTIAL COMMODITY. IF THE DESTRUCTION OF SAIGON COULD BE AVOIDED, IF AN INDEPENDENT VIETNAM COULD CONTINUE TO EXIST, ONE MIGHT HOPE, EVEN IF REASON RECOGNIZES THE DIMNESS OF THE HOPE, THAT THINGS MIGHT IMPROVE. THIEU ASKED WHAT I THOUGHT WAS THE FUTURE OF LAOS. I SAID IT HAD BEEN VERY CLEAR TO ME FROM THE END OF THE 1962 CONFERENCE THAT HANOI COULD TAKE IT OVER ANY TIME IT SUITED ITS PURPOSE, IF THE NON-COMMUNIST SIDE IN LAOS REMAINED WITHOUT OUTSIDE SUPPORT. THE PRESENT ARRANGEMENT COULD HAVE BEEN ACHEIVED YEARS AGO, HAD HE BEEN WILLING THEN TO CEDE TOTAL CONTROL TO EASTERN LAOS.

5. THE CONVERSATION WENT ON FOR ABOUT AN HOUR AND A HALF. I WILL

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SEND YOU A FULL HEARING WHEN I HAVE TIME. HE FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE ESSENTIAL POINT OF MY PERSONAL APPRAISAL THAT IT WILL HAPPEN VERY SHORT, THAT EVENTS WERE RUNNING TOO FAST TO FOLLOW VERY LONG, AND THAT SPECIFIC NOT MOVE SOON, EVENTS WOULD OVERTAKE HIM. I MADE IT ABSOLUTELY PLAIN THAT I HAD SPEAKING PURELY PERSONALLY, AND THAT I HAD NOT, AS AN INDIVIDUAL, NOR HAS WASHINGTON, SUGGESTED THAT HE RESIGN.

6. THEN SAID HE WOULD DO WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS BEST FOR THE COUNTRY. I SAID THAT I KNEW THAT HE WOULD. HE WILL THINK ABOUT IT. HE MAY DO IT. HE MAY VERY WELL TRY ONE OF THE MANEUVERS THAT HAVE KEPT HIM AHEAD OF HIS OPPONENTS, BUT THE TIME FOR PULLING RABBITS FROM HATS IS RATHER SHORT. ON BALANCE, MY GUESS IS THAT HE WILL LEAVE RATHER SHORTLY ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. IF HIS GENERALS GIVE HIM A FEW MORE DAYS HE MAY WELL COME UP WITH A DRAMATIC RESIGNATION THAT WILL BE USEFUL.

7. I WENT HOME, READ THE DAILY NEWS DIGESTS FROM WASHINGTON, TOOK A SHOWER, SCRUBBED VERY HARD WITH THE STRONGEST SOAP I COULD FIND. IT DOESN'T HELP VERY MUCH.

8. WARM REGARDS.

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